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ABSTRACT

This publication describes a powerful system for managing students' learning and enhancing the quality of programs in British colleges of further education. The system described is for full-time students because that is the clearest way of exemplifying the practical form such a system would take. It discusses these basic principles: students need recognition and encouragement, learning and achievements are not limited to qualifications, and learning needs to be managed. A two-page overview of the learning management system indicates which chapters provide detailed information on different aspects of the system. Each chapter begins with an outline. More detailed "notes" follow. The chapter on designing the system considers the structure of the system, finding the resources, and the role of managers. The following chapter focuses on what happens in the system: the role of the personal tutor, the role of the teacher, conducting a planning and review session, specifying achievements and learning targets, and the summary document. A chapter on managing quality discusses the quality of the college's courses and the quality of the learning management system. The publication concludes with a description of the origins and development of the thinking behind records of achievement, action plans, and profiles. (YLB)

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MANAGING LEARNING

THE ROLE OF THE RECORDING OF ACHIEVEMENT

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MANAGING LEARNING

THE ROLE OF THE RECORDING OF ACHIEVEMENT

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FOREWORD

There is much talk about the importance of good management in education at the moment. However, it soon becomes apparent that what is usually being referred to is the management of resources, institutions or people. Perhaps this is a good time to emphasise that it is the **management of learning** which lies at the centre of our concerns, though we should, of course, be careful to identify the implications this has for the handling of the other factors.

Managing Learning describes how a powerful system for managing students' learning and therefore the quality of college provision, could be produced by first being clear about the principles underlying the recording of achievement and action planning, and then linking this to course review and evaluation and to the interfaces between tutors, teachers, and curriculum managers.

It may sound like the recipe for a sermon composed of educational jargon but, in order to avoid this, the task is approached by describing what such a system would look like in practice as far as full-time students are concerned. It is emphasised that what is offered is an example, simplified in order to be clear, and that every college will need to design its own.

I believe that the benefits of getting such a system in place come through clearly. What is also clear to me, however, is the demands that this would make on staff. I would argue that the prize would make the necessary efforts worthwhile.

The approach quite specifically requires that:

- tutors establish a supportive yet rigorous relationship with tutees, so that both become able to use what may be very scarce one-to-one tutorial time to good effect;
- teachers (or the same staff in the role of teacher) learn not only how to be clear themselves about the learning targets they set students on route to qualifications, but also how to share these targets with the learners and their tutors so that both can understand them;
- curriculum managers learn to handle what may be uncomfortable feedback from the reviewing process, when it reveals inadequacies in curriculum design or the performance of individual staff. What is more, they have to learn to deal with these issues in time to benefit the current generation of learners.

It is in such areas that FEU plans to initiate further development and support work, and with regard to which it would welcome comments and examples of good practice from practitioners.

Geoff Stanton
Chief Officer
Further Education Unit

THE NEED TO MANAGE LEARNING

It has long been assumed that the role of further education (FE) colleges was to provide teaching. Now there is increasing recognition that teaching sometimes takes place without any learning and that learning can take place without any teaching. The current emphasis is on enabling students to learn, but if that is not to be a haphazard activity it requires a system for managing it. There is a need to select appropriate learning targets; to ensure that students have the means to achieve them; and to review progress regularly and deal with any obstacles encountered. The growing trend towards modular curricula, and towards 'open learning', where students are not taught in traditional classes, intensifies the need for an effective system for managing each student's learning. It is the **tradition** of records of achievement and action plans which provides the ingredients for such a system.

ACTION PLANNING AND RECORDING ACHIEVEMENT

Records of achievement and action plans are now familiar terms, yet in some quarters, perhaps especially in further education, there is uncertainty about their value and purpose. They have had a complex history, and even now there are various overlapping systems with different names and procedures. Moreover, recording achievement systems are often not linked to course review and evaluation or to the management of quality, although all of these are closely related activities.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Managing Learning seeks to dispel this confusion by identifying the fundamental principles underlying records of achievement and action plans, and suggesting how they could be linked to course review and evaluation to produce a powerful system for managing students' learning and enhancing the quality of college provision. It does this primarily by describing what such a system would look like in practice. The system described is, of course, simply an example. A college would need to design its own, but a detailed example is a useful basis on which a college can develop its own model. That is the purpose of the model described in these pages. It works through the design issues which any college would have to address — how much time to spend with each student, how learning targets could be formulated, what documents would be needed — and explains why the suggested solutions are likely to be appropriate.

Full-time students

The system described is for full-time students because that is the clearest way of exemplifying the practical form such a system would take. Just as this reference model needs to be adapted to the requirements of individual colleges, so it will need to be altered to suit different types of students. The purpose is to describe principles and procedures by showing what they could look like in practice.

COMMENTS WELCOMED

The Further Education Unit is to follow this publication with some evaluation of learning management systems, and therefore welcomes comments from colleges on their experiences in devising, implementing and evaluating such systems.

INTENDED READERSHIP

This publication is intended for:

- College senior managers, who will want to know why they should spend resources on such a learning management system, and what it would involve.
- College staff who operate managing learning systems: it describes principles and practical procedures in some detail.

It may also be of use to others outside colleges, in TECs, training establishments and schools, who are interested in records of achievement, action plans and the management of quality in colleges.

HOW TO USE THIS PUBLICATION

Pages 8 and 9 show the learning management system at a glance, indicating which chapters provide detailed information on different aspects of the system, and which may be of interest to different types of reader. Each chapter begins with a summary in bullet points which can be used, for example, as an overhead transparency (OHT) for staff development.

For detailed information on the thinking behind action planning and recording achievement, see the chapter on **BACKGROUND - ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT (p.50)**.

■ STUDENTS NEED RECOGNITION AND ENCOURAGEMENT

A person's capacity to learn is strongly influenced by attitudes and expectations. What a student has achieved needs to be positively recognised so that the student is encouraged and gains confidence, and so that both teachers and student raise their expectations about what can be achieved in the future.

■ LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENTS ARE NOT LIMITED TO QUALIFICATIONS

Formal qualifications cannot encompass all that it is important for a person to learn. They do not represent all the varied skills, abilities and personal qualities which a person may possess. Action planning and recording achievement provide means for these wider achievements to be recognised and developed.

■ LEARNING NEEDS TO BE MANAGED

Learning, like any other important activity, needs to be deliberately managed with:

— appropriate targets set;

— progress regularly reviewed;

— problems dealt with.

For further details see **BACKGROUND (p.50)**.

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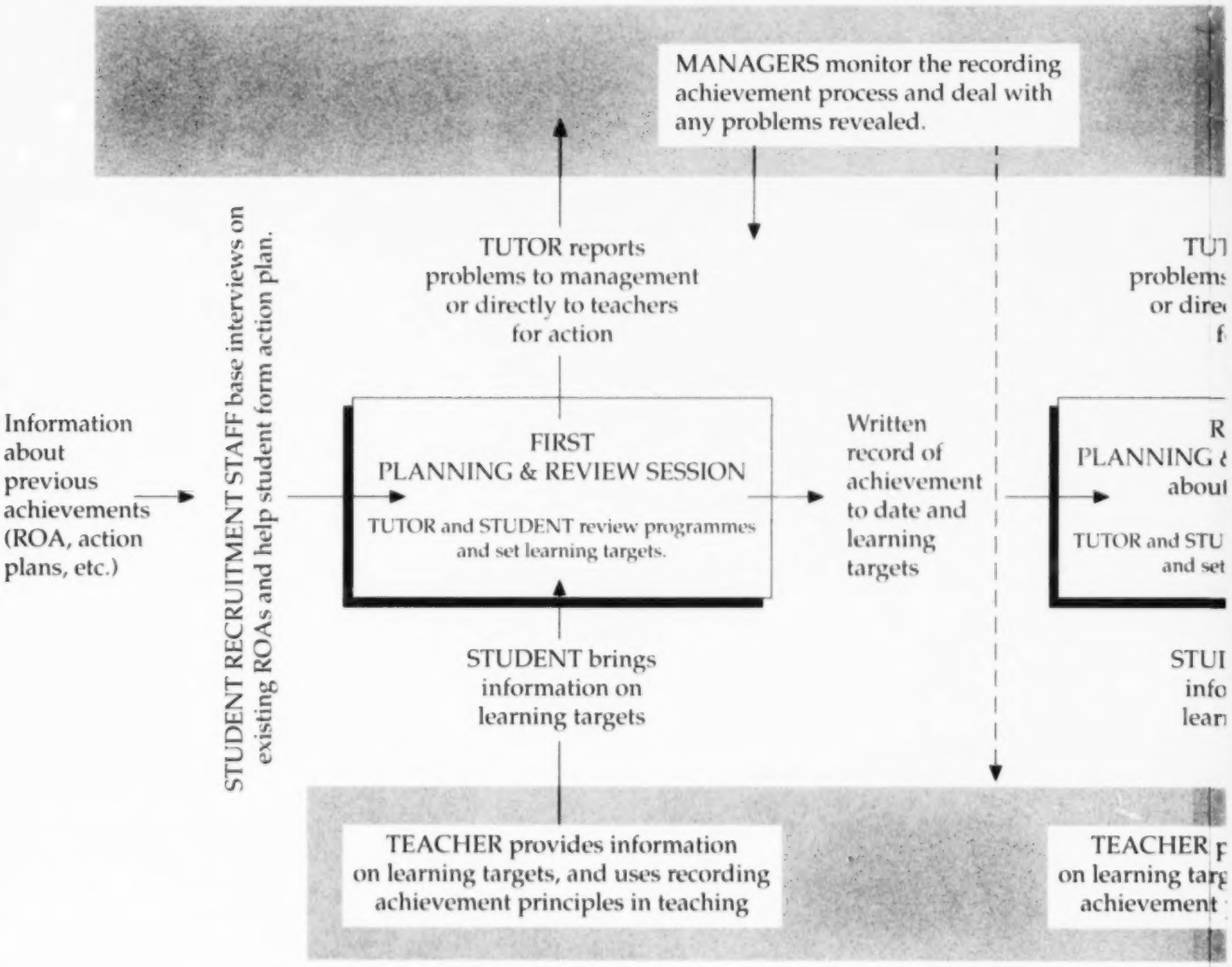
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STUDENT RECRUITMENT STAFF base interviews on existing ROAs and help student form action plan.
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THE LEARNING PROGRAMME

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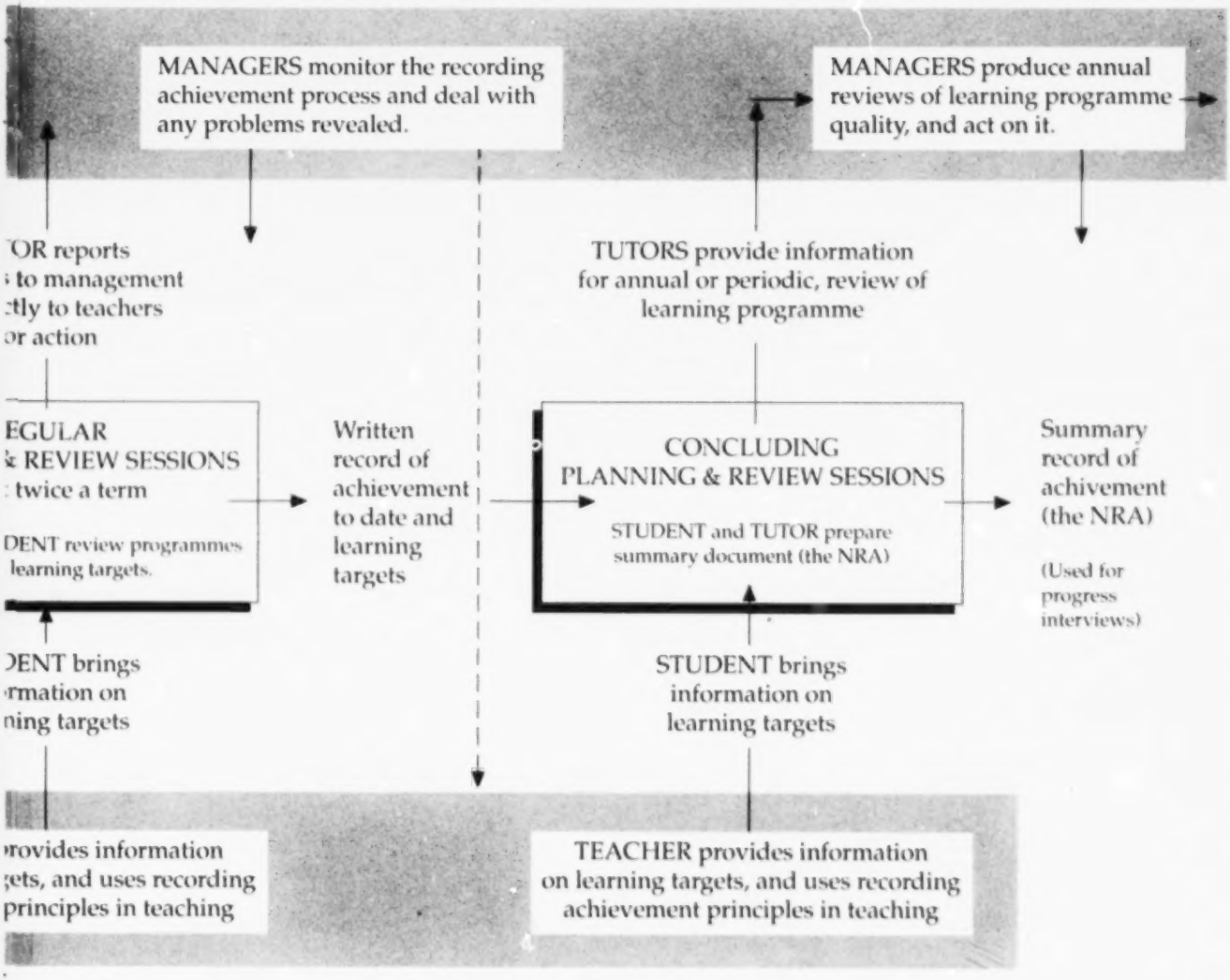
MANAGERS monitor the recording achievement process and deal with any problems revealed.
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Written record of achievement to date and learning targets
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TEACHER provides information on learning targets, and uses recording achievement principles in teaching

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THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM — IN OUTLINE

In designing the system, the following features need to be considered:

1. PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSIONS

2. LENGTH OF THE PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSIONS

3. FREQUENCY OF THE PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION

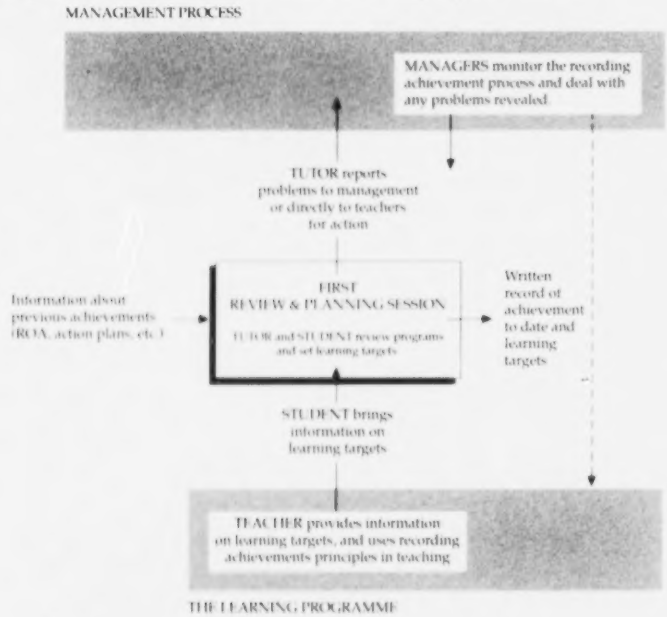
4. SETTING LEARNING TARGETS AND REVIEWING PROGRESS

5. DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

6. COURSE QUALITY REVIEWS

7. DOVETAILING WITH OTHER RECORDING ACHIEVEMENT SYSTEMS

The key elements of the structure are displayed below:


MANAGEMENT PROCESS
MANAGERS monitor the recording achievement process and deal with any problems revealed
TUTOR reports problems to management or directly to teachers for action
Information about previous achievements (ROA, action plans, etc.)
FIRST REVIEW & PLANNING SESSION
TUTOR and STUDENT review programs and set learning targets
Written record of achievement to date and learning targets
STUDENT brings information on learning targets
TEACHER provides information on learning targets, and uses recording achievements principles in teaching
THE LEARNING PROGRAMME

The system has the following features:

1. PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSIONS

In planning and review discussions, the personal tutor and the student review what the student has achieved so far, and plan future learning targets. These targets are then reviewed at the next planning and review session.

The achievements and learning targets concern:

- the formal curriculum (represented by the qualification which the student is working towards);
- other skills and areas of knowledge (such as economic literacy or information technology);
- personal qualities (such as self-confidence and resourcefulness).

Such accomplishments and learning can be gained outside the college course as well as within it.

These discussions should give the student confidence and encouragement. The student's progress is regularly reviewed and any problems can be remedied, so that the student is successful in their learning.

See **SPECFIFYING ACHIEVEMENTS AND LEARNING TARGETS (p. 31)** for further details.

2. LENGTH OF THE PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSIONS

These discussions should normally last at least half an hour, because it is difficult to see how any less would provide time for a discussion in sufficient detail to be useful, given FEU recommendations on what should take place during these sessions. A longer session would be better, but it is not likely that such resources could be made available. Half an hour, twice a term, for individual planning and review seems a realistic balance between the ideal and the possible.

See **CONDUCTING A PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION (p. 28)** for further details.

3. FREQUENCY OF THE PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION

Ideally each student would have a planning and review session with their personal tutor within a week of starting their course so that their learning is purposefully managed from the outset.

Ideally each student needs at least two sessions a term, perhaps, at best, in the middle and at the end of each term. This frequency would enable any problems to be dealt with before they became entrenched, and allow the personal tutor to provide regular encouragement and interest.

4. SETTING LEARNING TARGETS AND REVIEWING PROGRESS

Students need to be able to bring to the planning and review discussions detailed knowledge of what they will need to learn. Teachers therefore need to discuss this with their classes in the induction week before the first planning and review sessions. Teachers also need to provide regular information on student progress in the form of comments, marked work, and grades as appropriate to the course, so that students can bring this information to the planning and review discussions.

See **THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER (p.25)** for further details.

5. DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

The personal tutor may be able to resolve problems directly (e.g. advising the student on time management) or may need to refer them to teachers or managers (e.g. apparent shortcomings in the college course). It is important that problems revealed in the planning and review interviews should be acted upon and resolved.

See **THE ROLE OF MANAGERS (p. 17)** for further details.

6. COURSE QUALITY REVIEWS

An annual course quality review would consider the suitability of the curriculum, and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning.

See **THE QUALITY OF THE COLLEGE'S COURSES (p.40)** section for further details.

7. DOVETAILING WITH OTHER RECORDING ACHIEVEMENT SYSTEMS

At the admissions stage, the applicant should be asked to bring any existing record of achievement, training action plan, or similar document. School-leavers, and others, may have a National Record of Achievement. The interview would consider these documents and take account of decisions already formulated. Similarly, the first planning and review discussion would need to build on these earlier records and decisions, checking that the appropriate advice had been received and the student's intentions were clear and appropriate.

Similarly, the first planning and review discussion would need to build on these earlier records and decisions, checking the appropriate advice had been received and that the student's intentions were clear and appropriate.

For a discussion of how principles such as these relate to equal opportunities policies, see the FEU publication *Supporting Learning* (1992).

FINDING THE RESOURCES — IN OUTLINE

1. EXISTING RESOURCES

2. EXTRA RESOURCES

3. TRANSFERRING RESOURCES FROM ELSEWHERE

4. MORE FLEXIBLE USE OF EXISTING RESOURCES

5. RATIONALISING HIDDEN RESOURCES

6. USING THE COURSE INDUCTION PROGRAMME

1. EXISTING RESOURCES

Tutorial systems are a familiar feature of further education colleges. A personal tutor is usually seen as the person who takes responsibility for the general welfare and progress of a group of students, meeting them regularly, offering help and guidance with any difficulties they may have and referring them to other agencies, such as the careers service or a counselling facility, as appropriate. A typical arrangement is one hour a week on the timetable of the personal tutor and the students when they meet for a tutorial session. The use to which the session is put varies considerably and it is not unusual for there to be some doubt as to what activities should be carried out or how the personal tutors should discharge their responsibilities, beyond asking the students if they have any problems. These learning management suggestions thus provide a set of tasks designed to make maximum use of this resource.

2. EXTRA RESOURCES

It is suggested here that planning and review sessions would be normally about half an hour long, and occur twice a term, which is six times a year. One hour a week on the personal tutor's timetable is a traditional model. This would allow the tutor to conduct the equivalent of two planning and review sessions each week, making a total of 60 sessions in a full year, which would be enough for a tutorial group of ten students. This may be a rather smaller tutorial group than is customary, which suggests that these recommendations do require slightly more resources than are typically provided at present in tutorial systems. (The increased resources could of course take the form of either smaller groups or more personal-tutor time if there are to be larger groups.) There are several possible ways of finding these extra resources.

3. TRANSFERRING RESOURCES FROM ELSEWHERE

One, obviously, is to decide that recording achievement processes are sufficiently important to merit extra expenditure. If these processes facilitate learning and enable it to take place more efficiently, it may be that the students will derive more benefit from an extra hour of them than they would from the hour's teaching. Of course, flexible learning and open learning approaches require such tutorial functions to take precedence over the conventional teaching function.

Where increased expenditure is necessary, a phased introduction may be helpful. A full learning management system could be introduced initially only in certain sectors of the college. This would also allow the design of the system to be tried in practice before it was introduced throughout the college.

4. MORE FLEXIBLE USE OF EXISTING RESOURCES

A second approach, if additional resources are not provided, is to make more flexible use of the limited resources. A planning and review interview of less than half an hour, perhaps even 15 minutes in some cases, might be possible, though not ideal, for students whose progress appears to be satisfactory in every respect. If the personal tutor also teaches on the course, it may be possible to use some of the teaching time to hold planning and review sessions, perhaps when the rest of class is engaged in project work in the library, or on work experience. The personal tutor's time will in any case need to be used flexibly. There will be some weeks, for example immediately after the start of the course, when few, if any, planning and review sessions are needed because the students have only just drawn up their action plans and begun their course. There will be other weeks, towards the middle of the terms, when many more than two are needed.

5. RATIONALISING HIDDEN RESOURCES

A further point to consider is that there may be hidden resources already committed to what are, in effect, recording achievement processes. For example, the preparation of UCCA/PCAS reports and other types of college reports and references will be taking place in a college even if no formal learning management system exists. Numerous and varied forms of discussion between students and staff about student progress in their work will be taking place. The establishment of a properly resourced system is, to some extent, a matter of rationalising and redeploying existing resources.

6. USING THE COURSE INDUCTION PROGRAMME

The personal tutor will need a great deal of time — at least five hours for a tutorial group with ten students — during the first week of the course in order to help each student draw up their first action plan. But this resourcing should not be a problem since it can be regarded as part of an induction programme taking place before the normal teaching timetable begins to operate. This assumes that an induction programme is not taking place in the 'Admin. Week' before the start of term when teachers have other duties, but in the first week of term.

As will be seen from **THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM (p.10)**, the creation of each student's plan requires the students to obtain a significant amount of information from each of their teachers about the structure of the course. The induction period therefore needs to be designed with some care to ensure that students have sufficient opportunity to meet their various teachers and discuss the course with them before their action-planning session with the personal tutor.

THE ROLE OF MANAGERS — IN OUTLINE

1. DESIGN THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM
2. FIND RESOURCES
3. PREPARE STAFF FOR THEIR ROLES
4. ENSURE SATISFACTORY DAY-TO-DAY OPERATION
5. UNDERTAKE ANNUAL REVIEWS OF QUALITY

1. DESIGN THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

See **THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM (p.10)** for details. From the managers' point of view the following aspects of the design are particularly important.

Personal tutors must understand and be able to carry out their role. It is a difficult role in that it requires them to draw attention to deficiencies in the course or college provision. They need adequate preparation, management support and clear procedures to help them in this task.

See **THE ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR (p.20)** for details.

It is important that problems revealed in the planning and review discussions or interviews are acted upon speedily and effectively. There need to be clear lines of communication and responsibility for action. The person to whom the problems are referred needs to have sufficient seniority to be able to deal with them.

See **THE QUALITY OF THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (p.44)** for further details.

2. FIND RESOURCES

See **FINDING THE RESOURCES (p.24)** for details.

3. PREPARE STAFF FOR THEIR ROLES

Ensure that staff understand the principles and the terminology which will be used.

Provide clear information on procedures, and job descriptions for personal tutors.

The way in which the planning and reviewing discussion is conducted is crucial to the success of the managing learning process. The personal tutor needs to be sympathetic, tactful and sensitive, adept at listening and understanding, imaginative and creative in enquiries and in formulating and reviewing targets. This requires staff training.

See the **INTRODUCTION (p.5)** for details of how this publication can be used for staff development.

4. ENSURE SATISFACTORY DAY-TO-DAY OPERATION

- Ensure that recruitment and admissions processes help applicants to develop existing records of achievement and action plans.
- Encourage recording achievement processes in all teaching and learning activities.
- *Ensure that teachers indicate learning targets to students and provide regular marks or comments on students' work.*
- *Ensure that planning and review discussions take place at intended intervals, are conducted appropriately with up-to-date documentation and summary documents produced as required.*
- Ensure that problems revealed in the planning and review discussions are acted upon promptly and effectively.
- Produce an annual or periodic report analysing course quality; ensure that these reports are processed by the management hierarchy and that highlighted issues are dealt with.

See **THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM (p.10)** for further details.

5. UNDERTAKE ANNUAL REVIEWS OF QUALITY

Conduct annual or periodic reviews of course quality using the annual course reviews from personal tutors.

Ensure that findings are acted upon.

See **THE QUALITY OF THE COLLEGE'S COURSES (p.40)** for details.

THE ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR — IN OUTLINE

1. RESPONSIBLE FOR STUDENTS' PROGRESS

2. MANAGERIAL AND TEACHING ROLES

3. REGULAR INDIVIDUAL PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSIONS

4. FRIENDLY, SUPPORTIVE AND PRACTICAL

5. PROBLEM SOLVING NOT IGNORING

6. BEING SPECIFIC

7. THE SUMMARY DOCUMENT

8. PERIODIC QUALITY REVIEW

THE ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR — NOTES

1. RESPONSIBILITY FOR STUDENTS' PROGRESS

The roles of personal tutor and course tutor are complementary but distinct. A personal tutor has the primary responsibility of ensuring that a group of students is successful on a college programme while a course tutor has primary responsibility for managing a course.

In some colleges the two roles are combined for convenience and because this enables the personal tutor to get to know the students better. In others, the roles are kept entirely separate on the grounds that this enables the personal tutor to act as an independent advocate on behalf of the student; this can be useful where there are shortcomings in the course which the course tutor might be reluctant to acknowledge.

2. A MANAGERIAL ROLE

Whatever structure is adopted, the core of the personal tutor's function is managerial: to help students monitor their progress, deal with difficulties, and develop the skills to do this for themselves.

In some colleges, the personal tutor uses the timetabled tutorial time to help the students acquire fundamental skills and knowledge which are not directly addressed elsewhere in their course, such as study skills, problem-solving and time management, drugs awareness and 'economic literacy'. These can be a means to develop learning management skills, and there is clearly room for debate about the extent to which such work is a proper role for the personal tutor. Whatever decision is reached , it is important that the managerial role is properly carried out, and the course tutor's responsibility to integrate core skills, personal development and modelling, contextual learning into the main programme is not neglected.

See THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER (p.25) for further details.

3. REGULAR, INDIVIDUAL PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSIONS

The personal tutor function calls for a scheduled series of planning and review sessions with individual students.

Time is always a problem but to be effective, such sessions would usually need to be about half an hour long. Ideally, the first one would be within a week of the student beginning college, which is most feasible if it is part of an induction programme, before the normal teaching timetable begins.

There would then be further sessions about twice a term — in order to allow the personal tutor to provide encouragement and, especially, to deal with problems before they become entrenched. It is particularly important to maintain contact where the personal tutor does not teach the students or meet them for other purposes.

The personal tutor therefore needs to arrange, at the beginning of the course, a schedule of dates for planning and review sessions with individual students.

See **THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM (p.10)** for details.

4. FRIENDLY, SUPPORTIVE AND PRACTICAL

Where students are making progress they need to be encouraged and congratulated. Where they have difficulties they need to be helped to remedy the problems, whether the problems lie with themselves or with the teaching or services provided by the college.

If the difficulty lies with the student, the tutor must help the student to recognise this and suggest how improvements could be made. Hectoring and remonstrating — 'telling the student off' — should play no part in this; they only create an authoritarian atmosphere which prevents any serious consideration of causes and solutions.

The tutor's role is that of a counsellor and adviser, pointing out implications to the student and helping them to identify underlying causes, which can then be tackled. For example, if a student continually arrives late for college, there must be a reason for this. It might be that they are tired through having to work late at night in a part-time job, or because they are discouraged in their studies, or because their home background is one of habitual lateness, or for some other reason. Once the reason is uncovered, the problem can be dealt with appropriately. But this requires that the student sees the tutor as a wise ally, not as an institutional bully.

If the difficulty lies with the college, then the personal tutor should openly acknowledge this and assure the student that the college recognises its responsibility for remedying the problem. Managers need to recognise that this is a sensitive and difficult role for which personal tutors may need staff development support.

See below, and **CONDUCTING A PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION (p.28)**, for further details.

5. PROBLEM SOLVING, NOT IGNORING

It is very important that difficulties revealed in the discussions with a student are resolved. Some of these difficulties the student and personal tutor may be able to deal with themselves; for example, the student may simply need advice on how to plan the work load. Some may involve referring the student to other staff in the college (for additional studies where a student is weak) or to specialist counselling services. Some problems may be particularly demanding for the personal tutor because they are to do with deficiencies in the college course, perhaps poor teaching or inadequate facilities. If, as will sometimes be the case, these are problems which the personal tutor is not able to deal with, then they must simply refer them to college management. College management must ensure that there are clear procedures which personal tutors can use with confidence in their reliability and confidentiality.

6. BEING SPECIFIC

The recording achievement process is concerned with learning targets and descriptions of achievement. Unless these are specific and precise the entire process becomes vacuous. Statements such as, 'will aim to increase their self-confidence' are of little, if any, use because they do not refer to any particular development or action. It therefore becomes impossible to know whether any real improvement has taken place.

See **SPECIFYING ACHIEVEMENTS AND LEARNING TARGETS (p.31)** for details.

7. THE SUMMARY RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

Towards the end of the course, the personal tutor will need to help the student produce a summary document — such as the National Record of Achievement — which describes the student's achievements to employers or higher education admission tutors.

See **THE SUMMARY DOCUMENT (p.37)** for details.

8. PERIODIC QUALITY REVIEW

Periodically, perhaps as part of an annual review of course quality, the personal tutor needs to produce summary information to college management about student success and deficiencies in the college provision revealed by the recording achievement process.

See **MANAGING QUALITY (p.40)** for details.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER — IN OUTLINE

1. SUPPORT THE REVIEW AND PLANNING SESSIONS

2. APPLY RECORDING ACHIEVEMENT PRINCIPLES IN ALL THEIR TEACHING

3. INCORPORATE THE LEARNING OF KEY SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE INTO THEIR OWN TEACHING

1. SUPPORT THE REVIEW AND PLANNING SESSIONS

- by explaining to students what they will be learning and how they will go about it;
- by formulating specific and precise learning targets ensuring that students understand what they need to learn and how it is assessed;
- by providing comments, marks and grades as appropriate to students so that they have a good understanding of whether they are making suitable progress, or what problems might be need to be remedied;
- by accepting information, comments and advice from personal tutors or managers about the teaching provided.

This means that teachers may need to work in a more collaborative way with their colleagues than may traditionally have been the case. It could, for example, involve discussions about what learning styles suit different students, or how the students experience the teacher's classes, or other aspects of the teacher's work. Although this style of working can appear difficult at first, teachers often find it helpful and rewarding once it becomes more familiar.

See **THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM (p.10)** for further details.

2. APPLY RECORDING-ACHIEVEMENT PRINCIPLES IN THEIR TEACHING

- to build students' confidence in their capacity to learn by recognising what they have achieved;
- to allow students some influence and decision in what is learnt, in what order and in what ways, in order to maintain their interest and motivation;
- to help students regularly to review their progress and deal with any problems.

See **THE BASIC PRINCIPLES (p.7)** and **BACKGROUND (p.50)** for further details.

3. INCORPORATE THE LEARNING OF KEY SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE INTO THEIR OWN TEACHING

The development in the student of key skills and knowledge, sometimes referred to as core skills, transferable skills and cross-curricular themes, is a responsibility which all a student's teachers share, although this is often not acknowledged. It can sometimes cause conflicts of responsibility, and it is important that a decision to adopt this model does not lead to a diminution of the personal tutor's role in helping the student manage their learning.

The individual teacher needs to consider how to incorporate such learning into their own teaching, and they will be considerably helped if there is a college policy on such matters, such as a Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), core curriculum or entitlement curriculum, and the opportunity for teams of teachers to meet to consider a collective approach to such a curriculum.

See **SPECIFYING ACHIEVEMENTS AND LEARNING TARGETS (p.32)** for further information.

CONDUCTING A PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION — IN OUTLINE

1. PURPOSES OF PLANNING AND REVIEW

- recognise achievement
- plan learning objectives
- review progress and deal with any difficulties

2. AN 'ACTION PLAN' OR 'RECORD'

3. THE PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION

- achievement to date
- a long-term plan
- the short-term learning targets
- a progress evaluation and action needed

4. CHANGES FROM ENTRY TO EXIT

5. PREPARING FOR A PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION

6. PRACTICAL REQUIREMENTS

- a conducive environment
- careful time management
- photocopying and filing

CONDUCTING A PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION — NOTES

1. PURPOSES OF PLANNING AND REVIEW

- to recognise achievement in order to give the student encouragement and confidence based on real evidence;
- to help the student set objectives and plan learning;
- to review progress and deal with any difficulties.

2. AN 'ACTION PLAN' OR 'RECORD'

A planning and review document provides a structure for discussion and a written record for future reviews. Whether this is called a 'record of achievement' an 'action plan', or even a 'planning and review document', is unimportant. A suggested structure for the document is given below.

This written record will need to be updated at each planning and review session. Some parts, the long-term plan for example, will usually remain the same from one session to another, while others, e.g. the short-term targets, will need to be reviewed and revised more often.

The record will need to be kept to manageable proportions. As a rough rule, it should be no more than one or two pages long. Some, perhaps much, of the document can be written by the student outside the session itself, in the light of advice from the tutor during the session.

3. THE PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION

Planning and reviewing will need to have the following elements in the discussion and in the documentation.

- **The student's achievement to date**. This could take the form of a prior record of achievement or action plan. It provides the basis for the long-term plan and would eventually, towards the end of the student's course, be replaced by a new summary record of achievement.

See **THE SUMMARY DOCUMENT (p.37)** for further details.

- **A long-term plan**, for example to enter a particular type of employment or HE course, to give the student a clear purpose in taking the course. It provides the context for shorter-term action.

- **The short-term learning targets**, which specify exactly what the student will try to achieve before the next planning and review session.

See **SPECIFYING ACHIEVEMENTS AND LEARNING TARGETS (p.32)** for further details.

- A progress evaluation on whether the short-term targets are being achieved, any difficulties and, if so, what action they might require.

See **THE ROLE OF THE PERSONAL TUTOR (p.20)** for further details.

4. CHANGES FROM ENTRY TO EXIT

At the admissions stage, the applicant would be asked to bring with them any existing record of achievement, training action plan, or similar document.

If the student already has a record of achievement, the first planning and review session should build on these earlier records and decisions, checking that the appropriate advice had been received and the student's intentions were clear and appropriate. Otherwise, the first task should be to produce what is, in effect, a summary document to provide the basis for the short-term targets. During the course, planning and review sessions would mainly be taken up with specifying the short-term learning targets, and managing the achievement of them.

Towards the end of the course, the planning and review sessions would also deal with producing the summary document.

5. PREPARING FOR THE PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION

Personal tutors will need to familiarise themselves with the record of the previous session, especially the sections dealing with the progress review and action to be taken. They may also need to remind the student about the date and time, and the need for the student to bring to the session information about learning targets and work progress.

See **THE STRUCTURE OF THE SYSTEM (p.10)** for further details.

6. PRACTICAL REQUIREMENTS

■ A conducive environment

The personal tutor will need to:

— provide a quiet room, free from interruptions;
— establish a friendly, helpful, purposeful ethos;
— be receptive to the student's concerns;
— listen sympathetically;
— offer sound, practical advice.

■ Careful time management

If the planning and review sessions are generally half an hour long the tutor will have to deal swiftly with routine matters and concentrate on those which require detailed attention. Some time will be needed for keeping a written record, but it will be important to keep notes succinct.

■ Photocopying and filing

Both the tutor and student will need a copy of the updated planning and review document, and the tutor will need to store copies of these documents securely together with related material.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND LEARNING TARGETS — IN OUTLINE

Achievements and learning targets should be:

1. ALL INTENDED OUTCOMES

2. CONCRETE AND SPECIFIC

3. THE QUALIFICATION

4. GENERAL SKILLS AND PERSONAL QUALITIES

5. ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES

- cross-curricular themes
- additional studies
- use of college facilities

1. ALL INTENDED OUTCOMES

Most students expect further education to provide them with access to a more rewarding life, and to employment, either directly or through further education or training. The immediate, or long-term objective which they have in view is usually a particular qualification, which they expect to 'unlock the next door'. However, most learning, and most successful employment, involves a complex mix of factors, not all of which are directly measured by a formal qualification. Success may depend as much on qualities like self-confidence, communication skills, and general understanding of the world about them as on the specifics of a formal qualification. One of the benefits of a system for recording achievement is that it can provide a means of describing and recognising these factors.

It is therefore important that achievement and learning targets cover a broad range — they could usefully be grouped into three categories:

- *formal qualifications (or credits towards them);*
- *general skills and personal qualities (including core, personal or transferable skills);*
- *additional learning outcomes (including those which are not part of the main programme, or which are not formally assessed — for example, social and economic understanding, environmental awareness, skills in First Aid, swimming, IT, or the outcomes of participation in recreation and leisure activities, clubs and societies.*

2. CONCRETE AND SPECIFIC TERMS

If a record of achievement is to help individuals to plan their learning, and enable others to make judgements about their suitability for particular employment or further education, it is vital that it is as precise as possible, so that learners can be clear about what is expected, and others can be clear about what has really been achieved. It is important to attempt this, in the knowledge that no description of human achievement can be absolutely precise, and all involve some approximation and professional judgement.

In general, it is wise to avoid very general descriptions, using words like 'satisfactory', or ones which measure the individual only against his/her own previous performance: 'has made better progress this term' does little to help anyone to understand what has really been achieved.

Description against some external standard is better, whether this is an absolute standard 'can do X' or against a cohort 'has made more rapid progress than the majority of learners on courses of this sort'. Alternatively descriptions of specific behaviour 'took responsibility for organising a coach trip, which took place without any financial, or

organisational problems' or made a ten-minute formal presentation about Y to a group of 20 fellow students' can give a more precise feel for what might be expected of that individual in the future.

This is particularly true of qualities like 'self-confidence' which mean different things to different people, and where the same terms are often used to describe very different levels of achievement. A precise description of how the quality has been demonstrated helps the external reader to understand the judgement, and description of the kind of activity can help the learner to set realistic objectives for learning — the student lacking in self-confidence is helped more by the suggestion that s/he should plan to make three oral presentations to the class as part of course-work assignments during the first term, than by a general observation that s/he needs to develop self-confidence.

Phasing of targets is also important. There need to be short-term targets to be achieved week by week or month by month. This makes clear what action is necessary and allows the regular planning and review discussions to check that successful progress is being made.

Different types of achievements and targets could be formulated as suggested below.

3. THE QUALIFICATION

Individual students must have a clear understanding of what they have to do, and how they will be able to tell if they are being successful. They will need to obtain this information from individual teachers. The primary source for such information is the individual teachers, although sometimes the personal tutor may be needed to interpret. Normally, it would be for the teacher to provide the necessary information, and adequate discussion of it, before each planning and review session. It is then the student's responsibility to bring this information to the interview.

In practical terms, this means that at the beginning of the course the teachers will explain their part of it to the students. They will need to provide details of the syllabus or the national vocational qualification (NVQ) units, information on what topics will be covered by which dates, what the students will need to do, and what kind of evidence will be sought in assessment in order to meet the the minimum requirements or to achieve higher grades.

In the case of unit-based programmes like those leading to NVQs, students would ideally be credited immediately with any units which corresponded to their existing skills and knowledge, and the teachers would decide with them which further units they needed to achieve, and what form this learning and assessment would take.

This procedure will need to be repeated at appropriate intervals throughout the course.

4. GENERAL SKILLS AND PERSONAL QUALITIES

A central principle of recording achievement is that qualifications, the possession of certain skills and knowledge, do not represent all that is important about a person. Personal qualities and general skills are central to our ideas of what a person is, and there is much evidence that these are at least as important to potential employers as the more specific material often identified in exam syllabuses and occupational standards. Indeed any scan of job references and references for higher education reveals what a key role such qualities are believed to play. Increasing mobility in employment over a lifetime also makes the development of such underpinning skills more important. It is for these reasons, among others, that notions of 'core skills', 'personal transferable skills' and 'personal effectiveness' have entered the debates on post-school education in documents like the CBI report *Towards a Skills Revolution* , initiatives like BTEC common skills and the RSA's **Education for Capability** programme. The principles also underlie the development of GNVQs.

Yet, for all their importance, these aspects of the person are very difficult to describe in the abstract and thus very difficult to assess with any consistency. The difficulties can be seen in the variety of models of 'core skills' which have been developed by different agencies, often including a mixture of qualities, some relatively easy to assess, and others much more problematic. The debates about whether 'personal effectiveness' or 'problem solving' have any real meaning or can be assessed reflect the same problem.

The solution to the dilemma may lie in more precise descriptions of behaviour and evidence than in the pursuit of the abstract definition. A description of what an individual has done, in what context and with what kinds of support, is more likely to capture the real level of 'creativity', 'leadership' or problem solving. Similarly, a description of the kind of evidence which a learner will need to produce for assessment is more likely to help them to set realistic targets, and focus their learning.

Sometimes when it is difficult to address this problem, it is useful to examine existing assessment processes, which have often been designed to reveal these qualities, albeit without necessarily a very clear rationale. By looking at how the examiner discriminates between successful and unsuccessful candidates, one can sometimes catch the essence of the 'standard' more precisely than through abstract reflection.

Much of the student's achievement and development of these qualities will take place outside the classroom, and outside the college. The recording achievement process needs to consider what evidence of such qualities may be found in employment, in recreational and leisure activities, and in the home and social life. The student and personal tutor may also be able to identify learning targets in these areas.

For a further discussion of some of these issues, especially in relation to core skills, see the FEU bulletins *The Core Skills Initiative* (December 1990) and *Core Skills in Action* (February 1992).

5. ADDITIONAL OUTCOMES

An important function of recording achievement is to encourage students to consider the whole curriculum — their 'curriculum entitlement' as it is often called — and to decide what outcomes they consider desirable in addition to the main qualifications or other outcomes for which they choose the course. These could be of several different kinds.

- Cross-curricular themes, such as economic understanding or environmental awareness, or core skills such as IT, may already be present in the course, so that students are likely to learn these as an integral part of their main studies. But it will be useful to make these aspects of the course explicit because it will help the students to learn by developing their awareness and understanding of these objectives. It will also prompt discussion of them with each teacher on the course which will guard against the danger that teachers might overlook the possibilities for dealing with these themes. Again, if these are to be serious course objectives, they need to be expressed as definite, unambiguous short-term targets, described by the teachers as particular pieces of student work. For example:

  'The second course-work assignment will include a section on the need for energy conservation and methods of achieving it.' or *'We will have video and discussion of AIDS and HIV infection when we deal with such-and-such a section of the syllabus, and, although there will not be any set work on it, it is obviously something of importance to everyone, so make sure you don't miss the video.'*

- Additional studies, such as a First Aid course, a GCSE re-sit, swimming lessons, a beginner's IT course, can be treated in exactly the same way as the main qualification section of the action plan.

- College facilities, such as the recreation and leisure facilities, or the various clubs and societies, and the Students Union, are things which the college hopes students will use to the full, and again the planning and reviewing process can alert the students to what is available and help them to realise their intentions to use the facilities.

  For example, at the beginning of the course a student's action plan would note what the student intended to do, e.g. join the Film Society and go swimming once a week. The knowledge that these objectives were to be reviewed would encourage the student to pursue them, and the personal tutor would be able to offer suggestions on how to fulfil these resolutions if the student found difficulty in achieving them.

THE SUMMARY DOCUMENT — IN OUTLINE

1. PURPOSE

- explains the student's achievement to others;
- helps the student to recognise what they have achieved.

2. FORMAT

3. CONTENTS

- factual information on qualifications, education and employment history;
- other achievements not described elsewhere — other skills and knowledge, and personal qualities;
- an action plan for the future.

4. CONCRETE AND SPECIFIC DESCRIPTIONS OF ACHIEVEMENT

5. QUALITY MANAGEMENT

6. TIMING AND UPDATING

7. COACHING STUDENTS TO USE THE SUMMARY DOCUMENT

1. PURPOSE

The summary document is distilled from the detailed written records kept during the planning and review process. It has two functions:

- It explains the student's achievement to others. Employers and higher education admission tutors want to know what achievements, skills and personal qualities an applicant possesses in addition to their qualifications. The record of achievement provides this information.

- It helps the student to recognise what they have achieved. This bolsters their confidence, which in turn enhances their performance in employment or further studies.

2. FORMAT

Third parties — employers and admission tutors — are more likely to examine a student's summary document if it is in a familiar form. The new National Record of Achievement provides a nationally recognised format for the document.

However, the NRA is not the only form which the summary document may take. Many organisations want applicants to present information about themselves on the organisation's own application form. Applicants to higher education, for example, are expected to use the Universities Central Council for Admissions/Polytechnics and Colleges Admissions System (UCCA/PCAS) form. In such cases, candidates should use their NRA summary document as source material both for filling in the application form, and — particularly — for writing the support statement or a covering letter of application.

3. CONTENTS

The summary document can contain:

- **Straightforward factual information, such as the student's name, address, date of birth, their education and employment history, and their qualifications.** Although these details are available elsewhere, it is useful for the summary document to gather all the relevant information together in one place.

- **Achievements not described elsewhere, to do with skills, knowledge, significant experience, and personal qualities.** THIS SECTION IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT precisely because the information is not available elsewhere. It can be based on the Additional Outcomes section of the planning and review records and include:
  - — cross-curricular themes, such as social and economic understanding, environmental awareness;
  - — additional studies, such as a First Aid course, a GCSE re-sit,

swimming lessons, a beginner's IT course;
- use of college facilities, such as recreation and leisure facilities, clubs and societies;

and the **General skills and personal qualities** section of those records.

For further details see **CONDUCTING A PLANNING AND REVIEW SESSION (p.28)**.

- **An action plan for the future**. This can be helpful both for the student and for third parties reading the document. It forms a natural part of the student's personal statement.

4. CONCRETE AND SPECIFIC DESCRIPTIONS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Descriptions of achievement need to be precise and explicit if they are to be useful. Vague, general phrases, such as 'has good problem-solving skills' need to be avoided. Instead, achievement should be described in terms of actual incidents, examples and pieces of work wherever possible.

SPECIFYING ACHIEVEMENTS AND LEARNING TARGETS (p.31) suggests how descriptions can be made precise and valuable.

5. QUALITY MANAGEMENT

There are various ways in which the accuracy or quality of the summary document can be assured, and information about this needs to be provided if employers and admission tutors are to be confident that they can rely on the contents of the document.

See **MANAGING QUALITY (p40.)** for further details.

6. TIMING AND UPDATING

The student will need their summary document for employment or higher education interviews towards the end of their college course and it will need to be kept up to date.

7. STUDENTS SHOULD BE COACHED IN HOW TO USE THE SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Admission tutors, employers and staff development managers may not ask to see the NRA or even be aware of its existence. The student needs to be coached in how to:

- introduce it into the applications procedure or career development interviews;
- use it as a basis for discussion in such interviews;
- build on it for future action-planning.

THE QUALITY OF THE COLLEGE'S COURSES — IN OUTLINE

1. COURSE QUALITY DETERMINANTS

- the appropriate curriculum
- student success

2. MANAGING QUALITY

- by planning an appropriate curriculum (the student's learning targets)
- by reviewing progress and dealing with difficulties so that students are successful

and ...

3. PERIODIC QUALITY REVIEWS

- by college management;
- based on personal tutor reports;
- submitted to governors;
- and acted upon.

4. REVIEW REPORTS

- treat different types of learning targets separately;
- quantify results where possible and meaningful.

THE QUALITY OF THE COLLEGE'S COURSES — NOTES

1. COURSE QUALITY DETERMINANTS:

- the appropriateness of its **curriculum**, which needs to be more than that required by qualifications alone.

See **SPECIFYING ACHIEVEMENT AND LEARNING TARGETS (p.31)** for details.

- **student success** — the extent to which students efficiently achieve their learning targets.

2. MANAGING QUALITY

- by **planning an appropriate curriculum**: ensuring the student embarks on an appropriate course and, during the course, works towards suitable learning targets;

- by **reviewing progress and dealing with difficulties**, so that students are successful;

- with **periodic quality reviews**.

3. PERIODIC QUALITY REVIEWS

In addition to the regular planning and reviewing which takes place between the student and their personal tutor, it is useful to have a periodic, perhaps annual, overall review of the quality of the college's courses. This could be **carried out by the college management**, based on summary reports from the personal tutors.

Each personal tutor would produce a brief report on the extent to which learning targets had been achieved, with notes on any improvements needed in the course. This could also draw on questionnaire surveys of the students' perceptions of the college courses and facilities.

Management would collate this information, report on overall trends and identify the action needed to maintain or improve quality. To ensure that due attention was given to the issue of course quality, the review report could take the form of an **annual report to the college governors**.

Clearly, it is important that the review should not become a purely paper exercise, and that the **report's recommendations are actually carried out**. Making the quality review a formal report to the college governors guards against this danger.

If these reports are to enable quality to be managed and improved, there must be administrative arrangements for processing and acting upon them. This will take a different form in each college. In a college with a traditional departmental structure, the personal tutors might make their annual reports to the head of department who would then compile them into a single report which reviewed quality in the department as a whole.

A vice-principal responsible for quality might collect these into an annual review of college quality submitted to the college governors. At each stage, it would probably be useful to standardise the format of the report and the way in which different types of information were reported. At each stage there would need to be a managerial responsibility to deal with the matters highlighted by the report, as well as to ensure that the learning management system functioned satisfactorily.

4. REVIEW REPORTS

Reports should distinguish between different types of learning targets, using the categories employed in the planning and review process:

- the qualification, or the student's main objective;
- additional outcomes, including cross-curricular themes, additional skills and knowledge, and learning activities;
- general skills and personal qualities.

REPORTS SHOULD BE QUANTIFIED, where possible and meaningful. Precise and unambiguous statistics are very powerful and revealing forms of information. The achievement of **qualifications** is an example: '85% of the tutorial group obtained their BTEC National Diploma, but only 62% achieved their intended grade'. **Some additional outcomes** will take the form of qualifications — GCSE re-sits, First Aid certificates, and the like — and these can be handled in the same way. Other targets may also be quantifiable, at least in that there is no doubt about whether they have been achieved: for example, having learnt to do all that one wants or needs to be able to do with a particular word processing package, or being able to run a half marathon by the end of the course.

Cross-curricular themes such as economic awareness are less straightforward. It might be possible to express achievement as the percentage of assignments completed or the average grade obtained in these types of assignments. However, cross-curricular themes may not have taken so mechanistic a form, or the information may be too detailed or entangled (perhaps as varied components of many types of course work grades) to be accessible.

In principle, achievements in all areas of the action plan could be quantified, at least in the sense that they will have been identified as a series of short-term targets which will or will not have been accomplished satisfactorily. It would be possible to report that a student had joined the film society and attended ten out of a possible 20 screenings and discussions. It could be reported that in the area of personal qualities, the student had achieved 75% of the short-term targets over the year. But these statistics would need to be treated very cautiously. The figure of 50% attendance rate at film society provides some information on the extent to which college facilities are being used by particular types of student, which might not be clear from ticket sales alone, but does not indicate that

the student has discovered new ways of looking at films. The student might have learnt nothing from this activity. It is very difficult to see what significance there is in a figure of 75% achievement in personal qualities; bare statistics are not appropriate here.

Clearly, in some areas of the annual report, statistics will not be appropriate: what is required is an educational judgement which weighs educational aims against what appears to have been achieved so far as the tutor is able to understand this from accumulated discussions and reflections with the student over the year.

Indeed, in all areas of the report, judgements and conclusions are needed, based on both statistical evidence and reflective impressions. Patterns and trends will be important:

> *'Women students' pass rates in A-level Maths were 30% lower than the men's, although this is an improvement on last year (42% lower), yet there were more complaints about poor maths teaching from the men than from the women students.'*
>
> *'Although many students attended the film society regularly, very few had shown any interest in the discussion or claimed any increased understanding of cinema. Most said it was just a social event, or a cheap night out. However, many said that they were now willing to watch sub-titled foreign films, something they would never have considered doing previously.'*
>
> *'The personal quality which many women students wanted to develop was their capacity to be "self- assertive", but all those based in the Annexe site of the college found the general ethos to be oppressively masculine, especially student union activities which were exclusively concerned with football and drinking. The staff — entirely men — were perceived as being sympathetic to the Student Union's viewpoint.'*

To summarise, the case for a recording achievement approach to managing quality is as follows.

Unless one merely equates education with the attainment of qualifications, any system which attempts to appraise the quality of educational provision will entail judgements which cannot be defended by statistical evidence alone, but which depend on a detailed consideration of educational aims and the extent to which they have been met. The great value of a recording achievement approach to managing quality is that judgements of quality are based on very deliberate and detailed considerations of these issues, taking place week by week throughout the college year with every student.

For a more general discussion of managing quality in further education colleges, see *Quality Matters: Business and Industry Quality Models and Further Education*, (FEU 1991) and *Towards An Educational Audit* (FEU1989).

THE QUALITY OF THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM — IN OUTLINE

1. SYSTEM QUALITY MANAGEMENT
2. SUMMARY DOCUMENT QUALITY
3. PUBLIC PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES
4. ACCREDITATION BY COLLEGE GOVERNORS
5. STUDENT CHARTER
6. EXTERNAL ACCREDITATION

THE QUALITY OF THE LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM — NOTES

1. SYSTEM QUALITY MANAGEMENT IS NEEDED FOR:

- Efficient course quality management

  The learning management system monitors and manages course quality, but it can only do this effectively if it is itself a good quality system: *'Who guards the guardians?'*

- Credibility of the summary document

  Employers, admission tutors and others who look at the summary document will want to know how to be sure that it is accurate.

2. THE SUMMARY DOCUMENT QUALITY

The summary document might, for example, claim that the person is resourceful and displays initiative, citing some of the student's actions. The person reading the document will want to know are these claims made by the student; have they been accepted by the college and if so, has the college has been able to verify the claims?

Some sections of the current NRA, such as the 'Personal statement', are signed by the student alone; other sections, such as 'Other achievements and experiences', are countersigned by a college representative. In either case, the reader will be aware that the contents are likely to have been influenced by the nature of the discussions between the student and the college (i.e. the personal tutor). If the personal tutor has been skillful, these will have revealed key features of the student's achievement and character. If there has been little effort or the discussions have been handled clumsily, the student may not have been forthcoming, and the resulting document may not do them justice.

In short, the quality of the summary document depends on the quality of the entire process of planning and reviewing throughout the student's course.

The signature of a college representative on the document implies that the college accepts some responsibility for its contents, but in the absence of information about the significance of the signature, it is not clear what this responsibility is. The signature may be intended to do no more than record the name of the student's personal tutor.

Even if the college stated that the signature indicated that appropriate procedures had been followed to produce the summary document, the reader might legitimately wonder whether all colleges had a similar idea of the procedures or whether some had more demanding and rigorous procedures than others. Therefore, a signature alone is not enough. The form of quality management applied to the summary document should be indicated on it. This will help the user to have confidence in it.

There are various forms this quality management could take:

3. PUBLIC PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES
Minimum quality management

A minimal form of quality management would be for the college to formulate a set of principles and procedures to be followed, and to make them and the college's commitment to them, public by including them in the summary document. This would be useful, but a public statement of intent does not itself guarantee that the principles and procedures will be followed. It may not even be clear what the principles would mean in practice; much might rest on interpretation. Public commitments are of limited value here.

4. ACCREDITATION BY COLLEGE GOVERNORS
Better, not independent

Quality management can be improved if there is some external scrutiny of whether principles and procedures are being suitably realised in practice. This could be provided by the college governors who would accredit the processes and the summary document. However, the value of their accreditation would depend on the extent to which they were able to be, and perceived to be, expert and independent.

5. STUDENT CHARTER
Clients control quality by being able to complain

There is an increasing recognition that customers can influence the quality of a service, if they are allowed to. This caveat is important. Students will not be able to influence quality unless they are provided with some effective means of obtaining redress when procedures are unsatisfactory. Although 'learning agreements' or 'student-college contracts' are familiar notions in further education, they are not usually enforceable by the student — although they are by the teacher and the college!

Students could exert some influence if there were a charter which:

- set out what managing learning procedures they should expect;
- indicated how they could obtain redress if their experiences of the procedures were not satisfactory, perhaps by seeking redress from successively more senior managers up to the principal and college governors;
- invited them to endorse the summary document with their signature once they were satisfied that they had received the service specified in the charter. The charter, signed by the student, would need to be included in the summary document.

This system, like any system, has its potential weaknesses. There will be some doubt about whether the students would have a good enough understanding of what the procedures ought to be. That danger can be reduced by making the charter as explicit and precise as possible. There is a risk that the students would, for various reasons, feel that they could not realistically withhold their signature and were not really in a position to require improvements from the college. The extent to which students were actually able to influence the college would depend, ultimately, on how much influence the college is willing to give its customers. In the more competitive environment in which colleges now operate, issues of consumer-sovereignty are likely to be seen as increasingly important. Furthermore, from the college's point of view there is a definite benefit in a student charter for managing learning: the management requirements of the system are simplified if the quality control function is in part carried out by the students.

An example of such a charter is shown on the following page, at the end of these notes.

6. EXTERNAL ACCREDITATION

Best, but most expensive

Perhaps the best, but also the most expensive, method of quality management is a respected external body to inspect and accredit the procedures and to endorse the summary document. The first page of the current National Record of Achievement has a space for such 'accreditation or validation'. (The two phrases are often used interchangeably in this context.) This means that an organisation, typically a recognised specialist body concerned with recording achievement, for example Oxford Certificate of Educational Attainment (OCEA), is satisfied with the procedures that have been followed and, by implication at least, attests to the accuracy of the document. There can be little doubt that an NRA accredited in this way will be more valuable than one which is not. Other types of organisations — local education authorities, training and enterprise councils — could perform the accrediting role, but, again, the value of their accreditation would depend on the extent to which they were perceived to be expert and independent.

EXAMPLE: THE STUDENT'S CHARTER

Recording achievement consists of a set of processes which help you to plan and manage your learning. It also helps you to complete your National Record of Achievement, a document which describes to others what you have achieved. These processes are carried out jointly by you and your personal tutor. This charter specifies what you are entitled to receive from the college and explains how you can ensure that you receive your entitlement.

The charter also describes your responsibilities.

YOUR ENTITLEMENT
What the college will give you

1. **You are entitled to** an action plan drawn up between you and your personal tutor in the first week of starting your course. The plan will identify what you need to do — your learning targets — for the next few weeks. It will be based on a review of your achievements so far and your future intentions. It will cover everything you hope to achieve in your college course, including qualifications, additional studies and activities, and the development of various forms of general skills, knowledge and understanding.

2.**You are entitled to** receive information and advice from each of your teachers, in advance of each planning and review session, on what you will be learning in their part of the course, so that you are able to formulate short-term learning targets in your action plan.

3. You are entitled to two planning and review sessions a term, lasting up to half an hour each.

4. You are entitled to planning and review sessions which are properly conducted in that the personal tutor is helpful and sympathetic, and takes steps to deal with problems which require college action (such as unsatisfactory teaching or inadequate facilities).

IF YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH THE SERVICE YOU HAVE RECEIVED from your personal tutor and the college, you can complain to your head of department (see the office for an appointment, or put your complaint in writing, addressed to ...). **You are entitled** to a written reply within ten days. If you are not satisfied with the response from the head of department, you should take your complaint to ...(vice principal, principal, governors, etc. with details of how they can be contacted and the time limit for dealing with complaints, suggestions on assistance from the Students' Union, parents, friends, etc.).

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. You are responsible for obtaining from your teachers the information needed for setting targets in the planning and review discussion.

2. You are responsible for attending the planning and review session at the time, date and place arranged, and providing the necessary information about learning targets.

3. You are responsible for attempting to meet the targets agreed and providing information on progress you have made.

'Record of achievement' suggests a document rather like a c.v. or school-leaving report — which indeed is what it is — and many people have found it difficult to understand why records of achievement should be of any particular significance, given that c.v.'s and school reports already exist. The inadequacy of the name lies in the fact that a record of achievement is not so much a document as a philosophy of education: a set of insights, principles and practices which aim at raising levels of educational achievement. The real value of records of achievement lies in what they have shown about the nature of knowledge; the way learning is organised; and the significance of certain types of accreditation.

These points are best explained by describing how the thinking behind records of achievement, action plans and profiles originated and developed.

EARLY TYPES OF RECORDS OF ACHIEVEMENT

Originally, records of achievement were introduced for the pupils who tended to leave school without any qualifications.[1] Their design reflected certain beliefs about the nature of low achievement and how it could be remedied.

In the first place, the records of achievement sought to show, both employers and the pupils themselves, that while these young people might not possess any exam certificates, they were by no means without skills, talents and achievements. After all, a school-leaver without an O-level in English Language might nonetheless be a very effective communicator as a sales representative — something which the holder of the English Language O level might not be. The implication was that the school curriculum, as embodied in O-levels and CSEs, was an unduly narrow representation of what constituted knowledge and achievement. Records of achievement aspired to show that this knowledge could take other forms, and that there were other types of achievement which were undoubtedly important for adult life and employment. Indeed, some of the early protagonists hoped records of achievement would challenge and modify the traditional school curriculum, especially since they suspected its character reflected the viewpoint of some groups in society rather than others, thereby subtly placing pupils from these other groups at a disadvantage. Thus, a fundamental intention of records of achievement was to redefine, or at least to widen, notions of what constituted achievement.

Secondly, there was a belief that educational achievement was strongly affected by attitudes and expectations. It seemed clear that repeated failure in examinations and tests would leave pupils feeling discouraged, lacking confidence and motivation. Teachers too would tend to have low expectations of these pupils, reinforcing the tendency towards low performance. Wider notions of achievement would improve the pupil's confidence and suggest to their teachers that they did possess abilities.

But this would not in itself deal with the problem of exam failure. The difficulty with exams was that they recorded low performance as a 'fail', instead of positively recognising what had been achieved, which would encourage the person to continue to learn and improve. Among many early supporters of records of achievement there was fierce hostility to exams and tests in general, which they felt could be dispensed with entirely. Not only did exams brand people as failures or successes, but they were intimidating in their ominous, clock-ticking formality, they defined achievement as the tasks set in the exam, and, it was claimed, they provided no information about the pupil's achievement other than a single letter grade on the certificate. Far better, it was argued, simply to provide a written description of what the person had achieved and could do, supplemented with examples of their work in a portfolio. What could be clearer, or more vivid, or more useful, than this?

In some forms of records of achievement, especially the school-based varieties, the pupil and teacher used their own words to describe the achievements; they started with blank pieces of paper, although they often employed a handful of standard headings, such as such as 'Curricular achievement', 'Extra-curricular achievement', and 'Personal qualities'. Other varieties, wanting to make the process quicker and more practical, provided ready-made descriptions, often called 'statement banks', from which an appropriate description could be chosen by ticking a box or pencilling in the reference number. The statements were sometimes arranged in hierarchical or sequential form to give the student a sense of making progress in their learning. For this reason, these types were also known as 'profiles'. City & Guilds 365 and the Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) Profile became the best-known examples. In a very few quarters, there was an interest in 'graded tests'. The idea here was that the damaging pass/fail nature of an exam could be replaced by a series of graded tests, allowing each person to pass a test appropriate to their level of attainment — this would encourage them to try for the next grade.

A third tenet of the records of achievement was a focus on the individual: taking a personal interest in each pupil and allowing the individual some scope for decision-making. This was of course a practical necessity in any case. Since there were to be no limitations on what constituted achievement or the ways in which it might be demonstrated, a teacher needed to spend some time with each pupil helping them to recognise and describe these talents and accomplishments. But this process, although ostensibly directed towards producing the completed record, was also intended to encourage the student in their learning by building their confidence, helping them to review, plan and manage their work, and giving them the incentive to produce more ambitious examples of work to include in their final record. Through this process they could be encouraged to take an active role in their learning, contributing to decisions about what should be learnt and how it should be learnt. The intention was that they should not feel the curriculum was something alien and immutable imposed on them as passive learners. Instead, it would be something in which they felt a sense of ownership, a series of things they wanted to learn because they had chosen to learn them. This

planning and reviewing was regarded as immensely important; it was often said that this 'formative' process was of greater value than the final 'summative' document itself.

Thus the early records of achievement were documents, usually several pages long, which described the pupil's achievement under various headings. They were produced jointly by the student and the teacher as the result of several, possibly many, interview sessions and sometimes included a thick 'portfolio' containing examples of the student's work. Students were encouraged to use these documents in the same way as they would use examination certificates: they were to be taken to job and college interviews as evidence of achievement and ability.

DEVELOPMENT

There were a number of difficulties with these early records of achievement. If they were to be valued as something like a qualification it was important that they should not be seen as something which only low-achievers would possess. So from very early on it was stressed that they were of benefit for pupils and students of all levels of attainment. Yet higher-achieving students had qualifications, and there was never any real doubt that it was qualifications which mattered for entry to college and employment. Strenuous efforts were made to persuade employers and admission tutors to use records of achievement in selecting recruits, and there were always a few vigorously publicised success stories: a school-leaver who had landed an excellent job because the employer was so impressed with the pupil's portfolio; a public assurance from a university that they would look sympathetically on candidates with records of achievement. But, by and large, a record of achievement was not a substitute for qualifications. The problem from the points of view of admission tutors and employers was that it was difficult to interpret the documentation. They did not usually have time to examine the examples of the student's work, and when they did it was not clear how much time or how much assistance the student had been given, or how the work would compare with that of a student with an examination certificate. The written descriptions of what the student had achieved ('can read and understand straightforward written material'; 'can solve complex problems unaided') were so open to interpretation as to mean little if anything on their own.

The nature of records of achievement therefore began to change. The hope of bringing about a radical shift in the school curriculum faded in view of the undented dominance of qualifications. The importance attached to the portfolio of the student's work began to decline. Now, records of achievement were seen as complementing qualifications, rather than as a substitute for them. Their value was that they provided information about general skills and attainments, and personal qualities — matters not addressed directly by qualifications. Employers and admission tutors had always attached considerable importance to these aspects of the applicant, but previously they had only been able to go by a report from the school or college, and impressions gleaned from the interview. The other great strength of records of achievement was their role in motivating and

encouraging the learner. This aspect also began to be developed more deliberately and sometimes as a separate activity, referred to as 'individual action plans', especially on training programmes and in educational initiatives sponsored by the Department of Employment.

However, a continuing difficulty, certainly for schools and colleges new to records of achievement, was the cost of conducting regular time-consuming interviews with each student. This remained a problem with no simple solution.

Little was heard of graded tests, and yet, interestingly, when the assessment system for the new National Curriculum came to be invented, it was based firmly on the principles of graded tests. The assessment was not to take the form of pass/fail exams, but of 'Standard Assessment Tasks' (SATs) comprising ten levels of achievement which would allow every pupil's achievement to be reported positively.[2] In this respect, the record-of-achievement movement, in its widest sense, did accomplish a fundamental change of the school curriculum.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Over the years there grew to be a confusing array of initiatives, schemes,[3] boxes, folders and procedures which, in different ways, were records of achievements or actions plans.

The long-established schools-based record of achievement schemes attached great importance to the process of preparing the record, and a long series of reports and publications[4] have sought to refine the procedures, with much concern for such matters as confidentiality, the authenticity of the statements, appropriate staff-pupil relationships, and scheme management.

By contrast, the National Record of Vocational Achievement (NROVA), did not have these traditions because it had different concerns. It was a stylish box containing information about NVQs, in which students were encouraged to keep documents listing the NVQ units they had acquired and those they intended to acquire. Its purpose was to help the learner understand the benefits of the flexible, modular structure of NVQs. It has now been superseded by the National Record of Achievement.

Individual action plans, or IAPs, as promoted by the Department of Employment, are found in training programmes and sometimes in schools. Their primary concern is to help the school-leaver or trainee to decide on an appropriate course of action by focusing on their career intentions and selecting a suitable course of training and education. For this reason, the person who provides the professional help and advice in formulating the IAP is not usually part of the school or college, but an external independent professional such as an LEA careers advisor. The action plan is reviewed periodically with the advisor to help the trainee or pupil see their chosen course through to a successful conclusion.

In February 1991, the Government introduced the NRA, the National Record of Achievement. It is to some extent the inheritor of the tradition of the schools-based records of achievement schemes but its emphasis is very much on a standardised summative document. In its initial form, it is a folder with six pages, headed: 'Personal Details', 'School Achievements', 'Qualifications and Credits', 'Other Experiences and Achievements', 'Personal Statement' and 'Employment History'. Accompanying notes advise on how the pages should be completed.

Not surprisingly, these different systems with their similar titles and overlapping functions have caused confusion. While different systems have different strengths and limitations, there has been an understandable tendency for those involved in a particular system simply to follow the recommended practices and traditions of that system. Thus, NROVA users may have failed to consider what skills and knowledge the learner could develop in addition to NVQs. There have been cases where schools with a record-of-achievement scheme introduced an individual action plans scheme, separately funded and managed, even though some action planning was already a feature of the records of achievement, thereby creating great duplication of work for the students, teachers and careers advisors.

The conclusion to be drawn from this must be that colleges, schools and others, need to consider what activities **should** take place, rather than simply following the practices and customs associated with one particular system. That is the purpose of this publication. It draws on the full range of systems and traditions in order to outline the essential features of a college-based system which maximises the potential of records of achievement and action planning.

REFERENCES

1. *Records of Achievement: Report of the Records of Achievement National Steering Committee* (the 'RANSC Report') DES 1989. *Records of Achievement: Report of the National Evaluation of Pilot Schemes* (the 'PRAISE Report'), DES 1988.

2. *Report of the National Curriculum Task Group on Assessment and Testing* (the 'TGAT Report'), DES 1988.

3. For example: OCEA the Oxford Certificate of Educational Achievement; and NPRA the Northern Partnership for Records of Achievement.

4. The most important of these reports are:

— *Records of Achievement: Report of the National Evaluation of Pilot Schemes* (the 'PRAISE Report') DES 1988.
— *Records of Achievement: Report of the Records of Achievement National Steering Committee* (the 'RANSC Report') DES 1989.
— *Guidance for Those Managing TVEI: Recording Achievement and Planning Individual Development* ('RAPID'), Training Agency, Employment Department 1990.

FURTHER EDUCATION UNIT

The objects for which the further Education Unit (FEU) is established, are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:

a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;

b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvement can be effected;

c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of experimentation in, and the development of further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;

d) to disseminate and publish information, and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information, about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

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